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STATE FOR NEA AND IO/PSC

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TAGS: [PREL](#) [PGOV](#) [PHUM](#) [MOPS](#) [KPKO](#) [MO](#) [WI](#)
SUBJECT: FM SHARES MOROCCAN ANGST ON WESTERN SAHARA WITH
DAS SANDERSON

REF: RABAT 0028 (NOTAL)

Classified By: Ambassador Samuel Kaplan for reasons 1.4 (b) and (d).

11. (C) Summary: Moroccan Foreign Minister Fassi Fihri offered DAS Sanderson a decidedly downbeat assessment both of Moroccan-Algerian relations and of recent developments surrounding the Western Sahara. He stated Morocco's willingness to participate in an informal round of UN-sponsored talks in February, but predicted that Algerian non-participation and intransigence would undermine their usefulness. He rebuked Algeria repeatedly for blocking progress on the Sahara, Maghreb integration and regional counterterrorism cooperation, and accused Algerian intelligence agents of manipulating Sahrawi independence activists. On a more positive note, Fassi Fihri emphasized King Mohammed VI's "strong desire" to further strengthen U.S.-Morocco relations and the GOM's willingness to work with to promote security in Africa. Fassi Fihri's remarks reflected continued, deep Moroccan frustration with what the GOM perceives as a lack of clear U.S. support for their Western Sahara strategy. End Summary.

12. (U) NEA Deputy Assistant Secretary (DAS) Janet Sanderson met January 22 with Moroccan Foreign Minister Taieb Fassi Fihri as part of her January 21-23 visit to Morocco. Ambassador Kaplan and PolCouns (notetaker) accompanied the DAS; Chief of Staff Nasser Bourita, Director of the Americas Division Fouad Yazourh and U.S. Desk Director Abderrahmin Rahhaly joined Fassi Fihri.

Making a Strong Relationship Stronger

13. (C) The Foreign Minister, who had just returned from France and had hurried to the meeting directly from the airport, opened on a positive note by praising the U.S.-Morocco relationship and our history of cooperation. King Mohammed VI respects the leadership of President Obama and deeply appreciates his friendship with the Secretary, Fassi Fihri said. "And I want to confirm to you how strong the desire of His Majesty is to strengthen our two countries' relationship." The FM suggested that the U.S. and Morocco create a "strategic dialogue" to formalize further their cooperation on Africa, the Middle East, counterterrorism and counter-radicalization, and what he termed a dialogue between Islam and the West. Regarding the latter, Fassi Fihri noted that "without government encouragement, such dialogue will not occur spontaneously," and he offered the GOM's continued good offices -- in partnership with Washington -- to advance the process. Finally, he asked for U.S. and international support for Maghreb integration, noting that "all the countries of the region -- not just Algeria -- need to become more serious" about working together.

14. (C) Fassi Fihri then quickly turned the conversation to the Western Sahara and bluntly accused Algeria of exacerbating and prolonging the conflict. Morocco welcomes resuming informal negotiations February 9-11, as UNSG Personal Envoy Christopher Ross has suggested, he said. However, GOM does not hold out much hope for the talks' bearing fruit, given Algeria's refusal to join Morocco and the Polisario around the table. The Algerians are a party to this conflict, Fassi Fihri insisted, and they cannot be permitted to manipulate Polisario negotiators and undermine the talks from behind the scenes, as they did during past negotiations. And in addition to undermining the Ross-sponsored talks, he continued, the GOA has stepped up its obstructive activities in the territory. Algerian intelligence operatives have increased efforts to incite Sahrawi activists to engage in "expression that is free but not peaceful," he alleged. Yet when the GOM takes action to ensure peace, the international community accuses it of human rights violations, and Algeria uses it as an excuse not to join the UN talks. Nowhere was this more evident than in the case of Aminatou Haider, whom the FM described as a pawn of Algiers and not, as many in the U.S. or Europe would have it, a real human rights defender. "If this continues," Fassi Fihri concluded, "it could kill the political process."

15. (C) More widely, Fassi Fihri accused Algiers of blocking Maghreb integration; of undermining regional counterterrorism cooperation and economic development; and of preventing UNHCR from conducting a census of the refugees at Tindouf. He reminded us that the UN had given Ross a two-fold mandate --

i.e., to broker talks aimed at resolving the Sahara conflict AND to find ways to improve relations between Algeria and Morocco -- and he asked that the U.S. press both Ross and Algiers, particularly on the latter. DAS Sanderson promised to explore how the U.S. could support that part of Ross's mandate.

Only Autonomy is &Credible and Serious"

16. (C) Finally the FM reiterated Morocco's deep desire for more robust Washington support for Morocco's autonomy plan. In 2007, Washington and Rabat presented the plan together. The Bush Administration had asked the GOM to soften some language and be more flexible, Fassi Fihri recounted, and it accepted that advice. He acknowledged that there were other options for resolving the Sahara conflict, but insisted that only Morocco's is "credible and serious." The other sides have offered nothing new, and the Polisario knows that a referendum is simply not possible, Fassi Fihri concluded.

17. (C) DAS Sanderson responded to Fassi Fihri's lengthy presentation by stating that Secretary Clinton has instructed the Department to place more focus on the Maghreb. In that regard, the key to progress in all areas centers on resolving the Sahara conflict, and the U.S. has become very concerned about the long delays in the UN process. "We do worry that the longer this goes on, the more it will continue to poison Algerian-Moroccan relations." As for the autonomy plan, Sanderson noted that the U.S. does support the autonomy plan as one solution among many, but that it was important for Washington not to pre-judge the work of the UNSG Personal Envoy. Looking forward, she also noted that there was much work to do in preparation for the renewal of MINURSO's mandate in April (septels), and that the U.S. and Morocco needed to work together to find a strategy for managing that process.

Comment

18. (C) Fassi Fihri's pessimistic analysis of the UN process

and his 25-minute tirade against Algeria reflect the GOM's deep, but understandable, frustration with what it perceives as a lack of clear U.S. support for Morocco's autonomy play. More difficult for us to understand -- and therefore more difficult to respond to -- are the GOM's vehement allegations regarding the role of Algerian intelligence in Western Sahara and its continued bewilderment over our negative reaction to the Haidar case (reftel). End Comment.

19. (U) DAS Sanderson has cleared this message.

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